

Report of Head of Resources

COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION PERFORMANCE – 1 APRIL 2013 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2013**1 Purpose of report**

- 1.1. To inform the committee of the council's performance, including Wellingborough Norse, during the first half of the year in handling customer feedback. It also includes details on requests for information considered under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations 2004. The report also includes complaints which have been referred to the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 1.2. This report relates to the council's priority of delivering an efficient and responsive service.

2 Executive summary

The council aims to fully respond to complaints within 12 working days. The performance for the year to 30 September 2013 against this target is 96% (95% to 30 September 2012). This does not include those complaints referred by the Ombudsman, as the Ombudsman dictates the response deadline for these.

3 Appendices

Appendix 1 – compliments received.

Appendix 2 – comments received.

Appendix 3 – complaints received.

Appendix 4 – Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulation requests received.

4 Proposed action:

- 4.1 **The committee is invited to RESOLVE to note the report.**

5 Background

- 5.1 Customer feedback is valued as a means to continuously review and improve the services offered by the council. This includes services delivered directly by council employees or through agency workers and contractors appointed by the council. The target to respond to complaints is 12 working days.
- 5.2 When a customer is dissatisfied with the council's response to their complaint, following a review by a more senior officer, they have a right of appeal to the Local Government Ombudsman. This report also contains details of complaints which have been received by the Ombudsman. Depending on the circumstances, the Ombudsman will consider whether the council has had reasonable opportunity to investigate the complaint within its own procedures. If not, the

Ombudsman will request this before carrying out his own investigation; these are identified in this report as referrals.

- 5.3 Compliments are considered as praise or expressions of satisfaction about any council activity, or about an employee or representative of the council. Comments are considered as observations which are neither critical nor complimentary, but include helpful suggestions for improving our services and our customer satisfaction.
- 5.4 Since its introduction in 2005, the Freedom of Information Act has instigated a culture change for authorities to represent a balance between greater openness and transparency of decision making and the need to protect information where disclosure would cause harm or otherwise be contrary to the public interest.

6 Discussion

Compliments

- 6.1 For this period, a total of 29 compliments have been received as follows, with further details attached at Appendix 1:

Service	Number of compliments received
Community	1
Environment (Wellingborough Norse)	10
Finance	5
Planning and Local Development	10
Resources	3
Total	29

- 6.2 When a compliment is received, it is shared with the principal manager, who acknowledges the feedback with the relevant individual or team.

Comments

- 6.3 For this period, a total of 27 comments were received as follows, with further details attached at Appendix 2:

Service	Number of comments received
Community	4
Environment (Wellingborough Norse)	19
Finance	0
Planning and Local Development	2
Resources	2
Total	27

Complaints

- 6.4 During the second half of the year the council received 45 complaints, of which 96% were responded to in full within 12 days. A summary of the complaints received for each service is detailed below, with further detail attached at Appendix 3:

Service	Number of complaints received	Completed	Within target
Community	3	3	3
Environment (Wellingborough Norse)	19	19	18
Finance	17	17	16
Planning and Local Development	6	6	6
Resources	0	0	0
Total	45	45	43

6.5 For the same period in 2012-13 a total of 82 formal complaints were received, of which 95% were responded to within target. A summary of the complaints received is detailed below:

Service	Number of complaints received
Community	8
Environment	33
Finance	28
Planning and Local Development	9
Resources	4
Total	82

6.6 As a result of the 45 complaints received for this period of 2013-14, 26 (58%) were not upheld whereas others involved lessons being learnt and appropriate action taken. Comments from managers in relation to complaints received are included at Appendix 3.

6.7 Possible reasons for the significant decrease in the number of complaints include the better weather of the summer in 2013, compared to that of 2012 which particularly impacted on grounds maintenance and the levels of complaints in relation to that. Other considerations include the fact that 2012 saw a number of national events celebrated locally (such as the Olympic Torch celebrations and Golden Jubilee), which in turn generated customer feedback.

6.8 The complaints received this period have highlighted that:

- (a) Environment (Wellingborough Norse) received the highest number of complaints, specifically in relation to grounds maintenance, litter and employee behaviour. This may be influenced by the fact that the many front line operations provided by Wellingborough Norse affect and impact on all residents and visitors to the borough and are highly visible services. The service responded appropriately and promptly to these complaints.
- (b) Finance received the second highest number of complaints this period, all of which related to the Revenue and Benefits service. This comes as no surprise considering the impact of the Welfare Reform changes, resulting in a significant increase in customer contact and demand and ultimately negative feedback. Of the 17 complaints received, 9 were not upheld.
- (c) There was no significant pattern with regard to the complaints for Planning and Local Development.
- (d) Two of the complaints for Community related to noise nuisances and neither of these was upheld.
- (e) Resources did not receive any complaints during the period.

Ombudsman

- 6.9 During this period, the council received six cases from the Ombudsman. Two of these were premature complaints, ie those that are sent directly to the Ombudsman by the customer, but where it is considered by the Ombudsman that the council has not been given reasonable opportunity to investigate and reply to the complaint. One of these was in relation to an empty property charge for council tax purposes and the second was about the council's response to and handling of a noise complaint.
- 6.10 The remaining four complaints were not investigated by the Ombudsman; details of which are set out below:

Nature of complaint	Reason(s) for not investigating
Council tax exemption.	Complainant had not exercised their appeal rights.
Numerous issues of council tax, bus pass, blue badge, housing benefits, housing options.	Complainant made the complaints too long after they occurred, they had not exercised their appeal rights and the Ombudsman cannot investigate complaints about the conduct or commencement of court proceedings.
Decision by the council not to take enforcement action as a result of the complainant's chimney fumes.	The council had taken account of the complainant's representations and no fault was found of the investigation in to the matter.
Refusal of planning permission and the handling of the application.	Complainant had exercised their appeal rights and the Ombudsman cannot challenge this.

Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Requests

- 6.11 During the first half of the year the council received 233 requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act, 30 requests for information under Section 29 of the Data Protection Act and 185 requests under the Environmental Information Regulations (a total of 448). There was one Data Subject Access request.
- 6.12 Of the 448 requests received; 443 (99%) requests were completed within the statutory 20 day working deadline.
- 6.13 A breakdown of the requests received per service area and the type of requester is attached at appendix 4. This summary excludes requests made under Section 29 of the Data Protection Act.
- 6.14 For the same period in 2012-13, the council received 140 requests under the Freedom of Information Act, 26 requests for information under Section 29 of the Data Protection Act and 193 requests under the Environmental Information Regulations. Of these 359 requests, 354 (98.5%) were answered within the statutory deadline.

- 6.15 In response to the continuing increase in requests for information, officers are beginning to publish information on our website, particularly where there are routine requests of the same or a similar nature.

7 Legal powers

Freedom of Information Act 2000, Environmental Information Regulations 2004, Data Protection Act 1998.

8 Financial and value for money implications

- 8.1 Ombudsman investigations may recommend a local settlement by the council or prove maladministration by the council, which may lead to compensation being paid to the customer. In 2012-13, the council was not instructed to pay any compensation in response to complaints investigated by the Ombudsman and this remains the case so far for 2013-14.
- 8.2 There is the potential for the council to charge for the provision of information supplied under the Freedom of Information Act, should it exceed 18 hours work at £25 per hour, ie £450. Since the introduction of the Act, the council has not received any income as a result of a request for information, mainly because there is a duty to allow applicants to amend their enquiry so that it remains below the 18 hour threshold.

9 Risk analysis

Nature of risk	Consequences if realised	Likelihood of occurrence	Control measures
Council proved negligent by the Ombudsman.	Potential compensation claim and negative reflection of the council.	Low.	Ensure heads of service investigate or scrutinise all complaints/potential Ombudsman referrals.
Confidential information provided in error in response to an FOI request.	Contrary to the Data Protection Act.	Low.	Suitably trained employees and legal guidance in case of doubt.
Not meeting statutory deadlines to respond to FOI requests.	Potential referral to Information Commissioner.	Medium.	Stringent recording and monitoring arrangements in place. Suitably trained employees and legal guidance available.
Council fails to take improvement opportunities identified by complaints.	Rising levels of dissatisfaction by customers.	Medium.	All feedback is measured by Organisational Development to identify lessons learnt and improvements required, as resources permit.

10 Implications for resources

Officer time and materials in carrying out investigations and for providing information for requests.

11 Implications for stronger and safer communities

There are no implications for stronger and safer communities as a result of this report.

12 Implications for equalities

Monitoring customer feedback provides an important source of assurance that council services are fair, equitable and free from discrimination and harassment.

13 Author and contact officer

Karen Denton, Principal Organisational Development Manager.

14 Consultees

Heads of Service, Principal Managers, Information and Performance Officer.

15 Background papers

Electronic files and spreadsheets held in Organisational Development.

Line Number	Detail of Compliment	Service Area	Service Response
1	Regarding staff member helping client with hardship load for housing benefit and bidding for property on Keyways.	Planning and Local Development	Employee made fully aware of compliment.
2	Customer just wanted to say that our employee in the Housing team had been a very great help and really gone out of their way to make sure the customer was getting a good service. Customer wanted to inform the council of what an asset the employee was to have at the council and really pleased by how helpful they were. Customer felt it was nice to speak to someone who really cares and does their job so well.	Planning and Local Development	Response sent from Principal Housing Manager thanking for kind email and employee made aware.
3	Someone in the office giving a prompt reply and excellent service.	Finance	Passed on to employee handling benefits emails.
4	Service, help and patience given to help customer find historical evidence needed.	Planning and Local Development	N/A
5	Member of the Housing team for assisting with housing issues - living with a friend, was homeless and in priority need. Prioritised for housing through housing allocations and awarded accommodation.	Planning and Local Development	Response sent from Principal Housing Manager.
6	Helping with the housing of a relative. Thank you card received for team member.	Planning and Local Development	Customer has a slight learning disability so the Housing Allocations team met with them to complete a housing application. The customer did not own or understand computers and so the Housing Team placed bids on her behalf and she secured an appropriate property.
7	Customer had received a single person survey form following the death of his wife and was seeking confirmation that he was completing the form correctly. Employee went through the form with customer and confirmed that based on the information he had given me, he had filled out the form correctly. Customer then thanked the employee for their help and understanding (relating to the loss of his wife) and then went on to make the compliment about Council staff always being helpful, understanding and supportive.	Finance	Employee made aware of compliment.
8	Customer wished to compliment the council on providing the new multi-court facility off Shelley Road.	Planning and Local Development	Customer thanked for their compliment. Customers are appreciative of the work done by the council to improve the quality of life for local people.
9	Compliment paid to an employee from the Council Tax team whilst visiting the swimming pool. Employee was told how lovely and helpful the team are.	Finance	We are just doing our job but it is being done well and it is nice to be appreciated by our customers.
10	Service request received by BCW but should have been sent to NBC. Request passed to NBC and customer advised who was very pleased and grateful.	Resources	Common courtesy to let a customer know who they need to be dealing with and pass their details on, as appropriate. Always nice to receive a thank you and know you are doing a good job.
11	Party in the Park event.	Community	Comments forwarded to the rest of the Community Support team for their information.
12	Member of Staff in dealing with a grant application for repairs to her home. The compliment regarded the officer's empathy with the customer.	Planning and Local Development	N/A
13	Customer had fallen behind with council tax payments and officer helped with payment arrangement and ultimately the customer's finances overall.	Finance	N/A
14	Member of staff dealing with reference to her late father's property and called to confirm the sale of the property and her sincere thanks for helping and understanding during a difficult time.	Finance	Nothing went wrong as this was a compliment for good customer service.

15	Customer advised that from start to finish and the service had been so helpful and understanding. They hadn't had any dealings with the Council before and had only heard negative comments but felt we were brilliant, especially during the first meeting at which we understood everything they were going through and made them feel there was light at the end of the tunnel for the customer and their children. Customer couldn't fault their experience of dealing with the Council and give thanks for all that was done for them and their family as without us they would be homeless and probably forced to take their children back into an unsuitable environment.	Planning and Local Development	N/A
16	Support and guidance provided to candidate applying for a vacancy at the Council.	Resources	Feedback shared with employee and thanked for providing this level of customer service.
17	Member of staff thanked for kindness, compassion and the dignity with which customer was treated.	Planning and Local Development	Principal Housing Manager contacted the customer to thank her for her time taken to compliment a member of the team. The customer responded that the employee was exceptional and was glad that she may be recognised as such by her employer.
18	Customer felt that an employee had dealt with their complaint excellently! A summons was issued in error caused by an erratic payment pattern, but customer was up to date and a manual check would normally have identified this.	Resources	Customer unhappy with the summons and demands sent. Employee asked for their details and was advised they would call back and then made sure the Council Tax Supervisor looked into the complaint as soon as possible.
19	Housing team member thanked for their ongoing help, support, understanding and reassurance in getting the customer somewhere to live.	Planning and Local Development	Customer was asked to leave their property and was extremely worried about having nowhere to live as they could not afford the deposit and first month's rent on a private tenancy. There were funds available in the Prevention Fund to secure the tenancy and this enabled the customer to move in and not become homeless.
Wellingborough Norse Compliments			
1	Gardeners on what a wonderful job they do to Swanspool Gardens and how lovely they are kept.	Environment	Passed comments back to team responsible for the maintenance of the Swanspool area.
2	Trimming off the lower branches of the trees in Westfield Road.	Environment	Customer wanted to compliment the staff for making the visibility for road user better. Compliment passed onto the team.
3	Flowerbeds in the Wellingborough area.	Environment	Passed on Compliment to teams
4	Regarding the alleyway has been cleaned and looks a lot better and it's the best it's looked for a long time.	Environment	N/A
5	***Customer called to express his gratitude for the way his bulky collection was handled by team, they worked swiftly to remove several items from inside his property and were very professional.	Environment	
6	***Customer originally called with a grass cutting enquiry but ended the call by saying how nice the flower beds were looking.	Environment	
7	***Customer of an assisted collection service said she would like to thank the crew for putting her bins back under her bay window. She is very disabled and needs crutches to walk so very much appreciates them putting her bins back. She thinks its a wonderful service!	Environment	
8	***Customer called to express their gratitude for the way their tree enquiry was handled, including the works carried out.	Environment	

9	***Customer wanted to pass on their sincere thank to all Norse staff involved in the maintenance of Doddington Road Cemetery for doing such a great job. Last Summer, they had to contact us re the poor state of the cemetery and was having to cut the grass themselves weekly around their deceased's grave and was finding it difficult as they are a pensioner. However this Summer, they were delighted to congratulate us all as the cemetery was looking lovely and well cared for. So 'Well Done everyone! and a big Thank You.	Environment	
10	***Customer emailed to say thank you for our email regarding Assisted Refuse Collection for their mother. The service was no longer required as their mother had recently been admitted to a care home but wanted to take the opportunity to thank us for providing the service.	Environment	
*** = Received direct by Wellingborough Norse			

Line Number	Comments	Service Area	Action Taken	Lessons Learnt
1	Customer uses the cycle route around Wellingborough, but has noticed that large section of the route requires substantial maintenance, which could cause damage to bikes or accidents.	Planning and Local Development	Initial email sent direct to customer to acknowledge comments and to explain that the matter was being looked into further and that another response would follow. A second email was sent with a copy of our local cycle map detailing adopted routes and provided details of the County Council Cycling routes officer. No further email was received from the customer.	N/A
2	Customer's elderly mother wanted to enquire about delivery date of the Link, but no-one was available to take the call and was given a mobile number to call. No-one was available to take the call from the customer. There was cover for an officer on leave, but no-one in the room at the time of the call and voicemail was switched on.	Resources	Apology sent, with an explanation that voicemail was switched on.	N/A
3	Customer concerned of health and safety hazard to the public arising from unrestricted access to a former gravel pit being used as a fishing lake.	Resources	The concern was passed to the agent for the land owner requesting action to be taken to restrict access.	Whilst the customer expected the Council to be able to deal with this matter directly this has not been possible as our powers are limited on private land.
4	Unsure if property is lived in. Garden and roof untidy. Property has become an eye sore.	Planning and Local Development	Officer in contact with customer who submitted concern and updates being provided. As at 13/11/13 this has not been fully resolved. It is understood that the tenant may be in dispute with the landlord.	N/A
5	Visited shopping centre and had three different people approach about religious beliefs and overbearing religious singing that dominated Market Street. Customer unhappy at the unwanted attention received from a religious group whilst trying to enjoy the town centre beach event.	Community	Email sent to customer thanking for positive comments about event and that these would be passed on to the organisers. Follow up letter sent about religious approaches and advised that the Council has no powers to prevent or contain such activities.	Whilst being sympathetic to the rights of the religious groups, this enquiry (and other comments the council was made aware of) should be taken into consideration from the perspective of the unwanted attention putting people off visiting the town centre. Council not always able to meet customer expectations in respect of non commercial activity by individuals and groups.
6	Commercial skip overflowing and causing a nuisance.	Community	Enquiries were made and as no user was found and the company was no longer in existence. We arranged for the bin to removed.	N/A
7	Dog fouling on open space and careless dog owners.	Community	Response sent to customer advising of increased patrols in the area and asking for any specific details of the dog owners so future incidents could be followed up.	N/A
8	Complaint about problem of drinkers at the WWI monument in All Hallows churchyard.	Community	The Police were contacted. It was ascertained that this problem had already been identified as a priority and was adopted as a Local Investment Plan (LIP) for Swanspool by the Police for the month of October. Customer's concerns were also forwarded to the Police Inspector so that they could be logged with others and the Police could make contact with them if they wished, particularly with concerns about the Police response. We also made a commitment to feedback what had been done by the Police following their next Joint Action Group (JAG) meeting.	N/A
Wellingborough Norse Comments				

1	Fly tipping to the rear of property and nearby open space fields.	Environment	A quantity of fly tipping had accumulated on the land to the rear of Fulmar Lane. Arrangements were made for the following week to recover the fly tipping.	The council is not necessarily always aware of incidents of fly tipping and we rely upon the public to report these.
2	Concern that the artificial flowers on display in the town centre were not portraying the town in the most favourable light.	Environment	Customer was advised that the artificial flowers were provided by the Town Centre Partnership and was provided with the contact details for this organisation. Customer was also advised about the council's own arrangements for the display of fresh flowers.	That residents tend to assume that all aspects of the public realm are under the direct control of the council. The reality is rather more complex with many partners working together. The council doesn't necessarily have the statutory powers or resources to respond to every issue of concern raised by residents. These points were conveyed to the customer in reply to their enquiry.
3	Local business dumping waste in local residents bins.	Environment	Two visits were made to the customer to verify the details of the issue. On the second occasion the customer was not in. As a result a visit was made to the new fast food outlet an they were asked if they had a waste contract. They did not and as a result of this Wellingborough Norse have now taken over their trade collections. The outcome was very positive but the area is still be monitored.	None as we were very efficient and effective and resolved the issue quickly.
4	Bins not being checked if totally empty and left on the path in the way of pedestrians and wheel chair users.	Environment	The customer asked two questions to which a response/explanation was sent. Wet of compacted items do not always empty; customer advised if this happens to use a garden tool to loosen. Regarding bins left on the path, customer advised that teams do try and leave bins neatly and without obstruction. Customer advised to provide exact details (address and location) if there are future problems.	None.
5	Grass cuttings on Broad Green left on footpath after the rain made the footpath very slippery.	Environment	Manager called customer after investigation with grounds teams for the area. The grass was cut on a particular wet day and despite trying to blow the arisings away some may have been stuck to the footpath. Reaffirmed with the team that every effort should be made to leave all areas clean and safe before leaving site. Customer made aware of this action and manager contact details given for any future concerns.	Consideration to site safety should be a priority.
6	Grass cutting on land to the side of a property, but large triangle piece not cut.	Environment	Grass was missed in error and not cut. Instant response and missed part was cut. Customer informed and responded this was an excellent service.	To include missed area in work programmes.
7	Comments - regarding why the giant beech tree has been cut down?	Environment	Customer informed by email reasons for tree removal (diseased tree).	N/A
8	Length of grass in Castle Fields and play equipment looking very tatty.	Environment	Grass was cut for the third round cut (in line to meet required schedule). Manager viewed the site and acknowledged some patches hadn't been mowed well due to the length of the grass. Advised that area around play equipment was cut with smaller machinery and would be done once flower beds allowed.	N/A
9	Multi story car park back stairs smell of urine and several windows are broken. Ongoing issue with smell and damage.	Environment	Response given that stairwells are cleaned daily but smell had built up over time. Broken windows are on programme of work for this location.	N/A

10	Customer commented on the mess that was left after the cutting of grass verges in Eastfield Road. The grass was long and when cut was blowing around the road and pavement and also the amount of rubbish on the verge which was mowed over leaving shredded metal shards and broken glass.	Environment	Email sent to customer explaining that the grass was long due to the spring growth and the number of cuts is determined by NCC and BCW. Regards to the litter, picking should take place in advance of the mowing, but this had not happened on this occasion.	Grounds teams have been instructed to report high levels of litter to the cleansing charge hand prior to cutting and collect low levels themselves.
11	Regarding bags of rubbish outside a specific address.	Environment	Site inspected and bags had disappeared. Customer advised to let us know if bags of rubbish appear again at the location.	N/A
12	Reporting a problem tree and the quality of lawn mowing on Fairfield Road Isham and around the village.	Environment	Response sent to customer advising that the land was maintained by NCC and full contact details given.	N/A
13	Letter received regarding the garden waste collections being stopped from November to February. Customer dissatisfied at the prospect of the withdrawal of the green waste collection service at this time of year.	Environment	Customer advised that the service is least used during October and February and was being withdrawn in response to budget pressures.	The council needs to ensure that service reductions are properly explained to customers so that their expectations can be managed.
14	Resident is experiencing anti-social behaviour arising from pocket park due to fallen apples being thrown and dangerous branches.	Environment	Customer advised that action could not be taken to remove the tree from the park.	Unable to meet customer expectations
15	Council tax rebate requested as felt that residents in specific area do not receive the same level of service as the rest of the BCW residents. Customer lives on a private (unadopted) estate and is concerned that services are not being provided that would otherwise be furnished if they lived in an adopted area. Customer is requesting a rebate on their Council tax in lieu of services not provided.	Environment	Customer advised that no rebate is possible but that discussions are in progress to seek to resolve issues arising from unadopted status of the estate.	Customer expectations unreasonable in the circumstances.
16	Residents putting black bins out on the Thursday when green bins had just been collected the day before.	Environment	Telephoned the customer and agreed to deliver calendars to the residents to remind them of the schedule.	N/A
17	Bins being left out. This is not a complaint about the service we provide or any failure on our part, it is a complaint about residents leaving bins out.	Environment	Warning letters sent to residents with a view to taking enforcement action.	No
18	Request for service from residents to reduce the growth of woodland trees to the rear of their Close. This was a complex, multi-service issue that required lengthy research, investigation and discussion before a response could be given to the residents. Residents were concerned about the growth of trees to the rear of their properties.	Environment	A meeting was held of officers and councillors to determine what action, if any could be taken. The conclusion of this meeting was that there were no grounds to reduce the growth of the trees given that the wood was an established natural feature that pre-dated the construction of the houses.	Whilst residents concerns will always merit careful consideration there will be occasions where requests for service are unreasonable and cannot be met.

19	Fly tipping at the rear of properties and broken fence at property which is believed to be the source of the fly tipping.	Environment	Investigation carried out but unable to trace the source of the rubbish. Fly tipping cleared from site and Wellingborough Homes repaired fence at rear of property.	No
----	---	-------------	---	----

Line Number	Summary of Complaint	Service Area	Upheld	Details	Action Taken	Lessons Learnt
1	Lack of Council response to noise nuisance.	Community	No	Noise from neighbour and the Council not coming out when customer had called up. The caller is well known to the service and our partners and has been advised repeatedly about his complaint and how it will be dealt with.	The complaint was dealt with in accordance with our procedures and the complainant was calmer when contacted.	
2	Housing and Council Tax benefit overpayments.	Finance	No	Housing benefit and council tax benefit claim was assessed correctly. Claim assessed in accordance with regulations/legislation.	Supervisor investigated the case and discovered no error had been made. Adjustments were due to claimants change in circumstances and time of year in which this happened. Response send advising of this and assuring that assessment was correct.	N/A
3	Unhappy with the handling of a reported issue.	Planning and Local Development	In Part	Reporting of property issue escalated inappropriately and dissatisfaction of employee's approach in handling the case.	Principal manager took control of the matter and corresponded with the complainant and held meetings with them and other appropriate parties to gather facts and fully understand the issues being raised. This matter is ongoing and the principal manager is still corresponding with the complainant in order to facilitate an improved future relationship. Employee was advised that the reported issue could have been dealt with slightly different and took this on board for future cases.	N/A
4	Council tax summons .	Finance	Yes	Customer had emailed in to ask for their adjusted bill to be emailed as well as posted so that they could make arrangements to pay. This was not noticed when acting upon their instructions and as a consequence they did not receive the notice and did not pay. Following this reminder letters and a summons with costs were issued, however complainant was abroad for three months so did not receive them and was only aware of them on their return.	Customer contacted the team, and originally advised he could not have the summons and costs removed. Customer then made payment in full but wanted to make a formal complaint. Having reviewed the complainant's original email, it showed their request for an email copy and confirmed their intention to pay, so the summons and costs were removed from the account.	Complainant's letter was received at a particularly busy time, however we clearly did not read it carefully, as if we had the situation would have been avoided.
5	Closure of alley way.	Planning and Local Development	No	Customer felt frustrated because he felt the council were blocking any chance of a resolution. Unfortunately the customer had no officer details of any earlier conversations he'd had.	Customer was contacted by telephone to obtain full information and it transpired the request was not to shut off an alleyway but to close off a cul-de-sac. We agreed to explore the viability of this which initially included working with Police Community Safety Team and internal colleagues. A site visit was be carried out together with the complainant, who now has direct contact details for the appropriate officer dealing with this. Complainant is content that they we are listening and their suggestion as to how to resolve it is being explored.	

6	Decline of the town centre.	Planning and Local Development	No	Complainant dissatisfied with the course of town centre regeneration asserting that no effort is being made to improve local facilities and services.	Complainant advised, by letter, of the extent of improvements undertaken and planned to regenerate the town centre.	Council to seek to raise the profile of town centre regeneration activities and projects so public are aware of work undertaken and planned.
7	Housing benefits being stopped.	Finance	Yes	Complainant was told by WHomes that benefit had been stopped. Rushed to the council to provide information; not happy at having to wait to be seen by an advisor as daughter was unwell and undergoing serious medical treatment. Claim had only been suspended and customer had been given a month to provide the information but they had to wait to see an advisor.	Customer advised that their claim wasn't stopped but suspended and that if they were in a rush to put information in the post box.	Sometimes need to be flexible.
8	Default notice for council tax bill.	Finance	Yes	Customer complained that we were 'harassing' them by sending too many notices, however on checking we did not send anything more than they needed to receive. However, some of the notices were issued as payments had been allocated to an incorrect invoice. An apology for this error had already been made prior to this complaint being received.	Following the apology on the phone and the new agreement we had made for payments, and officer called to clarify the details for the new arrangement.	Customers do not always understand that we have to issue notices because legislation says we have to. Sometimes our systems seem over complicated, as each amendment on the system tends to generate a letter to the customer, which can be confusing.
9	Complaint regarding a neighbours and not heard anything from the Council after sending a booklet in two weeks ago.	Community	No	Complainant initially felt as though 'no-one was doing anything' because the booklet they'd handed in could not be located and we were unsure why it would have come to the council rather than Wellingborough Homes.	Complainant was contacted and the process was explained. The complaint was passed on to Wellingborough Homes to investigate and take appropriate action. Complainant was informed of action taken and advised what to do and also to expect contact to be made by Wellingborough Homes who were taking up the matter.	It is always important to obtain facts and understand where matters could be improved. In this instance, it is unknown who advised for the booklet (presumably diary sheets) should be returned to the council, which caused frustration to the complainant. More needs to be done to ensure those contacting the council are given accurate advice - sometimes that is just to sign post or refer to the appropriate officer.
10	Behaviour of a member of staff in benefits towards a customer.	Finance	Yes	Behaviour of a member of staff in benefits towards a customer.	Investigation held and issues raised with the employee concerned. Letter of apology sent to customer.	
11	Housing situation and housing benefit and council tax arrears.	Finance	No	Dispute over rent and council tax arrears due to an error by the Council and the complainant's inability to bid on a bigger property. Summons costs added to the account and seeking these to be withdrawn and the account resolved and compensation.	Complainant advised that self employed benefit claims will always be subject to variation due to the fluctuating nature of income requiring assessment but no error had been made by the Council. As a gesture of goodwill the summons costs were withdrawn.	

12	Waiting for a decision on benefit claim.	Finance	No	Application made for backdated Housing Benefits and still waiting a decision.	Claimant had made two backdate requests and was sent two decision notices at the time of the request. Nothing had gone wrong - procedures were followed and the claimant notified of the outcome.	N/A
13	Council Tax Court summons issued for property.	Finance	No	Council Tax Court summons for property being rented out.	Summons was issued as we had not been informed of a change of circumstance.	Customer had ignored two reminders prior to the summons and also insisted we had received information about the new tenants, but a thorough search failed to locate any evidence of this.
14	Benefit overpayment.	Finance	Yes	Customer felt that their claim had been handled incorrectly and stated that we had been advised of a change in their circumstances (starting work). Customer was paid benefit beyond the change in circumstances on the basis of their JSA entitlement. Notification was received via Jobcentreplus several months later that the customer had started work. The claim was subsequently cancelled back to the date of working and an overpayment of Housing Benefit was created. Customer felt that they should not have to pay all of it back as they had informed us when their circumstances changed.	Contacted customer by telephone to discuss the situation and explain why their benefit was cancelled. Explained the procedures that led to the suspension of their benefit and then the cancellation. Officer tried to establish when and where the customer had provided the documents that were referred to but they could not be clear as to who they gave them to or when they'd been provided. Explained to customer that no evidence had been received and that benefit regulations had been followed in the handling of their claim.	In this particular case, no lesson has been learnt. It should be noted that benefit staff followed the correct procedures when handling the customer's claim. It should also be noted that customer service staff should continue to apply the set procedures when customer's contact the office to provide documentation. There is no evidence to suggest that the correct procedures had not been followed in this case. This was explained to the customer and their appeal rights were also explained. Customer stated by telephone that they did not wish to proceed with any benefit appeal and did not wish to follow through with their complaint.
15	Member of staff at Orient Way office for the Wellibus.	Community	No	Member of staff at the office for the Wellibus. The Wellibus is not a council run service, as had been assumed by the complainant.	Reply sent to complainant explaining that the council does not run the Wellibus service. Details of the managing organisation were given, along with guidance about how to access their complaints procedure. A link to a leaflet was forwarded, to help complainant.	N/A
16	Benefits being stopped.	Finance	No	Benefits have stopped.	Assessor sent postal intervention form to review claim to establish that circumstances had not changed. Claimant failed to return so claim was suspended and cancelled. Assessor contacted claimant direct, sent another review form and explained what information was needed.	N/A
17	Council tax and housing benefit.	Finance	No	Customer was chasing information that had been sent in but had not allowed enough time for us to process.	Customer also called in and subsequently resolved his issue. Supervisor wrote to customer to clarify this and to confirm all issues had been resolved.	None
18	Being refused housing due to rent arrears.	Planning and Local Development	No	Daughters refusal of housing. Applicant's parent queried the decision to withdraw the offer of a Keyways property due to daughter's arrears.	Applicant was asked to provide proof of rent paid as they were disputing that they had arrears.	Allocations acted in accordance with Allocation Policy

19	Documents not returned after submitted with housing and council tax benefit forms.	Finance	No	Customer not received personal documents back via post after benefit assessed.	Matter was investigated by senior team member. All items received were checked and returned via post. Letter sent to customer advising they may wish to check with the Royal Mail whether they have any post reported missing.	
20	Processing of housing and council tax benefit claim.	Finance	Yes	Length of time taken to assess housing and council tax benefit. Claim came in but Fraud Department kept documents.	Fraud team contacted and decision made to action the claim.	To make that decision earlier
21	Bailiffs knocking on door for non payment of Council Tax.	Finance	No	Customer complained that we had sent the Bailiffs for non-payment of Council Tax, when they had asked numerous times for a benefit claim form. Bailiffs were instructed to collect as we had not had any contact from the customer.	Having checked our records we had already sent several claim forms out and emails asking for claimant to contact us to discuss. However we had not received any response and as a result the hold we had agreed was removed and recovery continued. We emailed asking if they still required a claim form and said we would hold pending response. Customer did respond and has now received a claim form. Bailiff action is on hold pending return of this.	No
22	Empty property for 2 years. Reported and has never been acknowledged.	Planning and Local Development	Yes	Empty house and very untidy condition. Reported to the Council but no response received.	Officer was seeking to resolve the problem identified by complainant rather than reply to the complaint about it not being dealt with.	Should have diaried date for response to complaint.
23	Both have received Council Tax demands.	Finance	Yes	Council tax demands received one for Mr A & one for Mrs A. Summons were issued in error caused by an erratic payment pattern, but customer was up to date and manual check would normally identify this.	Summons and associated costs were removed and a letter of apology was sent.	Investigation ongoing to determine why account was picked up for summons as it was inappropriate. Call has been raised with Capita to advise.
24	Length of time to implement change of circumstances.	Finance	No	The length of time to process housing benefit claim.	Nothing went wrong. The customer did not provide the correct information despite being asked for it. That was why it seemed to take a longer time to assess their claim.	N/A
25	Planning complaint regarding development that had been approved.	Planning and Local Development	No	The complaint was to do with the layout of a development and that their comments had not been taken into account when the Planning Committee considered the application. The committee did and the layout was altered but not to the complainant's satisfaction.	Nothing - the complainant's comments were taken in to account and the layout was altered.	Need to ensure that planning complaints are correctly recorded and channelled.
26	Delay in assessment/ payment of housing benefit.	Finance	In Part	Customer misadvised about tenant's claim and alleged that no response was received to emails and telephone messages that were left.	Manager investigated and responded advising of reasons for delays in assessment/payment and the impact of the tenant's non-compliance with requests and anomalies in claim. Apology given for being misadvised.	
Wellingborough Norse Complaints						

27	Condition of the A45 after the cutting back of shrubbery.	Environment	Yes	Appalling state of the verges and central reservation following the grass and shrubbery cutting on the A45.	Area in need of cleansing delayed due to operational restrictions. Work was planned in and the complainant was advised of this.	None .
28	Rubbish in car park area of Shearwater Lane.	Environment	Yes	Dumped rubbish in car park area of Shearwater Lane and un-emptied bins with rubbish piled high and now accessed by a fox.	Waste bins had been tipped over by vandals, contaminated recycling bins, fly tipped waste. This is an ongoing problem in this area despite considerable efforts to educate and enforce. Un-numbered and contaminated bins were removed together with all loose waste. Visited the customer to advise of action taken.	None.
29	Poor level of amenity maintenance services in the area/estate.	Environment	No	Restated complaint of a year ago that resident was not receiving the same level of amenity services as other parts of the borough.	Complainant that they receive the same level of service from the Borough Council as equivalent areas of the Borough to the estate. Customer was also advised that grounds maintenance tasks are carried out in their area by Northamptonshire County Council.	Residents regrettably sometimes develop misunderstandings about the range and level of services the council is able to provide.
30	Unable to carry out burial of a relative on desired date.	Environment	No	Delay to burial for up to three weeks due to a high number of burials during this time. The family wanted to bury their loved one and we were unable to accommodate them at the time that suited them.	Communicated with complainant and liaised about suitable dates. It evolved the issue was with the funeral director and not so much the Council.	N/A
31	Grass cutting in specific areas of the Borough.	Environment	No	Complaint regarding grass cutting in specific areas of the Borough. The grass cutting was not complete as the edges were not strimmed and cut grass not collected and taken away.	Complainant felt that the standard of grass cutting had declined. A Wellingborough Norse manager visited the areas cited by the complainant and inspected the quality of the work. The manager reported that the work had been carried out to the required standard. The complainant was advised accordingly.	It is not always possible to meet the expectations of residents.
32	Maintenance at Finedon Cemetery.	Environment	No	Customer had laid turf on three graves they maintain and this had been harmed by weed killer.	Customer advised that this was the responsibility of Finedon Parish Council as it was their contractor who would have carried out the work.	N/A
33	Behaviour of employee.	Environment	No	Operator of equipment in the Swanspool Gardens.	Matter investigated but no evidence of ill-doing by employees. Customer contacted by the manager and advised of investigation, outcome and that the team had been reminded of their obligations.	N/A
34	State of the flowerbeds in Croyland Gardens.	Environment	Yes	Complaint from resident to a Councillor regarding the flowerbeds in Croyland Gardens.	The bed in question was being maintained by BCW and a response was sent to the Councillor advising of this and provided an update on the matter.	N/A
35	Grass not being cut next to property.	Environment	No	Complaint regarding the verge at the side of property which is not being mown and attracts fly-tipping.	Response sent to customer and was referred to the land owner Wellingborough Homes. Wellingborough Homes also informed.	N/A
36	Hedgerow maintenance to property.	Environment	Yes	Concerned about the overgrown state of the hedge to the front of their property. There had been some ambiguity about the responsibility for maintenance of this amenity in the past.	Wellingborough Norse responded and reduced the size of the hedge.	Clarification is required for some residents in respect of responsibility for the maintenance of amenities.

37	Standard of mowing of land off Stanwell Way- to the rear of Sainsbury's Northampton Road.	Environment	Yes	Mower had missed strips of grass 6 inches wide.	Manager gave complainant a direct number so they could call if the problem re-occurs.	Equipment has been changed this year and it has struggled with the long grass which grows between cuts so operations have been adapted to cope better with this.
38	Tree touching the house, flowerbeds very poor and overgrown weeds.	Environment	Yes	Tree outside of property was in contact with complainant's property. Also general upkeep of flower beds and around the area very poor and weeds are overgrown.	Letter sent to advise of a visit to the property and surrounding area and instructions issued for: fly tipping around the parking area to be removed; the raised bed outside of property to be cleared of weeds; the various shrub beds on the edge of the parking/garage area to be pruned to clear the footpaths and to remove any brambles, and grass cuttings are to be blown from the footpath across the central green. Our annual weed spraying programme for highways and amenity areas was underway and would include this area. Any weeds in the parking area itself or growing through onto it should be reported to Wellingborough Homes. The tree to the front of the property was inspected with the recommendation that it is pruned back from the property. Customer advised the work would be carried out at our earliest convenience, subject to funding.	Getting all resources to work together.
39	Trees to the rear of property.	Environment	No	Maintenance of trees and bushes to the rear of property.	When checked who owns the land it was found to be Wellingborough Homes as this land was transferred on 31 March 2009 as part of a package of land transfer made to them to carry out various Environment improvements. Customer advised of this and that we had forwarded the issue on to Wellingborough Homes.	None
40	Stall holder may be sub-letting.	Environment	Yes	Complainant was not happy with the service provided by one of the street traders.	Officer discussed the complaint with the street trader in question and reminded of the Sales of Goods Act and customer's rights. A letter was sent to complainant advising who to contact if this happened again. Customer also advised that they could obtain further guidance on the Sales of Goods Act and how to proceed if they were not happy with the further response of the trader.	Yes, need to ensure that all traders are aware of their customers rights - this will be discussed further with the Market Working Group.
41	Leaving bins, when empty, to near car.	Environment	No	Collection teams were leaving the bins neatly lined on the footpath after collection, unaware they were causing a problem for the customer to access their car.	The acting supervisor made the collection team aware of the issue and asked them to leave the bins in a different location after collection. The customer was sent an email to advise what action had been taken.	
42	Norse member of staff rude.	Environment	Yes	Complaint again Norse member of staff being rude to a member of the general public.	Manager spoke to complainant and the WNorse employee and it concluded that the complainant did not want to progress the complaint. Advice was given to the WNorse employee with regard to de-escalation of volatile situations and the matter was closed.	Highlighted the need for extra training on diffusing problem situations.

43	Behaviour of driver of refuse truck.	Environment	No	Bad behaviour and language of refuse collection driver towards complainant.	The customer and driver reported different versions of the same event. The customer insisted the driver was swearing, the driver and the two loaders insisted there was no swearing and that the driver simply raised his voice to be heard over the noise of the vehicle/bin lifts and through the customer's closed vehicle window. Other than that the two loaders, there were no other independent witnesses to the incident.	The driver and the two loaders were reminded of our expectations in terms of behaviour and customer service. The complaint was recorded.
44	Not happy with the bin collection and response from Norse when contacted.	Environment	No	Bin collection refused in specific location.	Unable to collect bins due to parked cars. Returned on third visit pulled bins down the road to empty.	No
45	Staff member from Wellingborough Norse refuse collection was arrogant and rude.	Environment	Yes	Customer was contacted by WNorse member of staff in response to a complaint received from a neighbour relating to rubbish being left out by the customer next to the bins on the street. Customer was asked about the additional rubbish and the additional bins, which was over the normal allocated quantity. This was not well received by the customer and the corrective approach taken by WNorse member of staff was perceived as rude and arrogant.	A letter of apology was sent to the customer. The needs of the customer relating to additional bins was met.	Following thorough investigation it was deemed that there was no intent to upset the customer and perceptions from both parties, whilst similar in fact had been conflicting and a misunderstanding of intent has been the result. The officer who visited the property had cause to engage with the public on a regular basis and has only ever demonstrated exemplary behaviour and it was not their intention to cause upset.

**Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations
Breakdown of Requests 1 April 2013 to 30 September 2013**

Service	Number of Requests	Answered within statutory deadline	Over 20 days
Community	42	42	0
Environment	3	3	0
Finance	61	59	2
Planning and Local Development	211	211	0
Resources (Inc. ICT)	52	49	3
Non BCW*	49	49	0
Total	418	413	5

*Of the non Borough Council of Wellingborough requests, 42 were for information held by Northamptonshire County Council.

Requester Breakdown

Requester	Number	%
General Public	10	2.5
Business Representative	251	60
Media	73	18
Charity	9	2
Local Government	4	1
Researcher (including Students)	58	14
MP	9	2
Trade Union	1	0.5
Total	415	100